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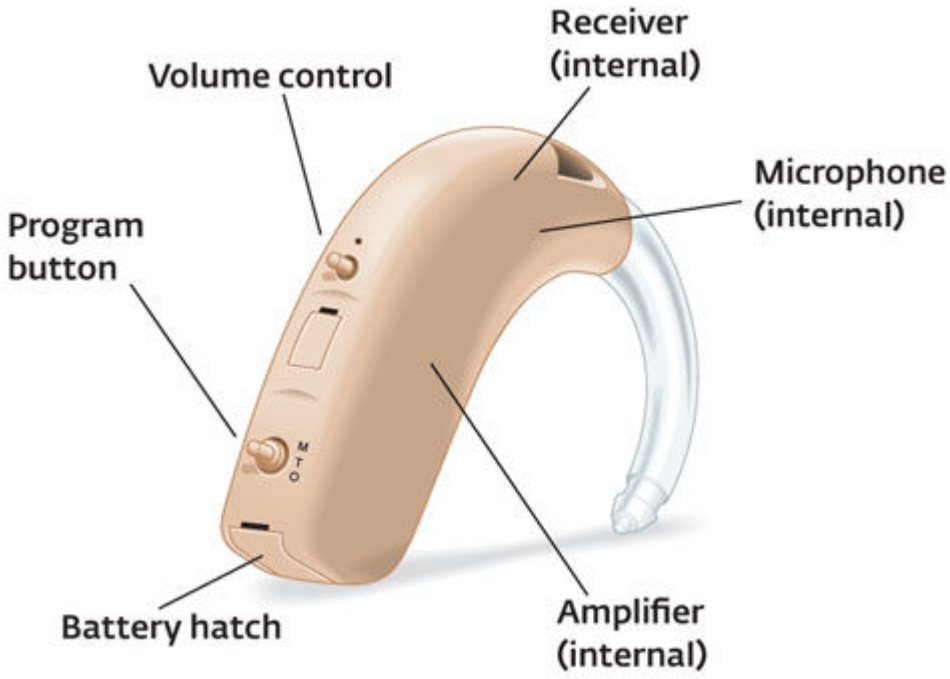

Illustration by Aaron Ashley

We evaluated major features of 44 hearing aids of varying styles and brands. We also asked our 1,100 survey respondents which features they had and how well their aids worked in various settings. You'll generally pay more for added features.

Telecoil amplifies sound from your phone without picking up background noise, which helps prevent feedback, though it's not needed in some styles of aids. Our survey suggested it helped. Our tests of these nine aids from seven manufacturers, performed in an outside lab, found all telecoils were effective. Behind-the-ear: GN ReSound Sparx (power model), Phonak Naída IIISP, Siemens Centra HP, Starkey Destiny 1200 Power Plus. Behind-the-ear open fit: Oticon Epoq XW, Sebotek Pac Voice-Q 821, Unitron Element 4 Moda Dir. In-the-ear: GN ReSound Ziga ZG40/D, Phonak Savia Art 33.

Directional microphone helps you converse in noisy environments. Survey results show it helps in loud social settings, while listening to the TV or radio, and for hearing household noises. These models got very good scores in our lab tests. Behind-the-ear: Starkey Destiny 1200 Power Plus, Siemens Centra HP. In-the-ear: GN ReSound Ziga ZG40/D, Phonak Savia Art 33, Widex Flash (power model).

Feedback suppression helps quell squeals when your aid gets too close to the phone or has a loose-fitting earmold. Survey results suggest the feature works. These aids got good or very good lab-test scores.Behind-the-ear open fit: Beltone Marq9, GN ReSound Dot 30, Miracle-Ear ME950. Siemens Cielo 2 Life S/Dir, Starkey Zon.5. In-the-ear: GN ReSound Ziga ZG40/D.

Other features worth noting

Digital noise reduction can reduce irritating background sounds such as the clinking of dishes. But it might not help in

all environments. Just one of the 44 models lacked this feature.

Low-battery indicator sounds to alert you that it's time to change batteries. Most aids had this feature.

Power-on delay helps prevent feedback as you insert the aid. Most aids had this feature.

Wax guard helps keep the aid free of ear wax, a cause of malfunctions and a major complaint of survey respondents.

Automatic volume control (compression) provides more amplification for low sound levels than high sound levels, which prevents high sound levels from being intrusively loud. Most aids had this feature.

Vents are tiny tunnels in earmolds that help minimize the stuffed-up sensation they often produce.

Manual volume control lets you adjust volume with a dial. Otherwise, the aid determines how loud it should amplify.

Behind-the-ear models only

Direct audio input allows the aid to be connected by cable to MP3 players and other audio devices.

Bluetooth capability allows hands-free use of cell and regular phones.

More details on tested models are available to subscribers at www.ConsumerReportsHealth.org.

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